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the tower

The University of Montevallo

Creative Arts Magazine

1995

"Those who would limit artists in any way,
in any medium,
I call craven;
Those who have not the courage to stand up
for their constitutional convictions,
I call cowardly."

— E. L. Doctorow

the
tower

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from the editor . . .

This year's race to publish *the tower* was a hard-fought battle. The staff this year had to contend with deadlines, late submissions, computer breakdowns, missing bid forms, and car wrecks, as well as moving our office from Public Relations to the Tower itself. And so it is, with glowing pride and awestruck amazement, that I dedicate this year's issue of *the tower* to the staff who put it together. To Nichole and Marion, who damn near had to break into the Tower when I was in the hospital in order to do layout. To Christina, Jamie, Rachel, Rylan, and Mandy, who sifted through over one hundred and seventy submissions and who put up with their editor's temper tantrums. To Cynthia Shackelford, Earline Howell, and Rob Collins, whose senseless acts of kindness made sure this magazine was printed. To all of you: thank you. This dedication is more than well-deserved.

I would also like to congratulate Abby Gorum and Randy Williams, who won our artistic and literary competitions. Their winning submissions may be found on pages fifteen and twenty-five.

I continue to be amazed by the amount of talent found on this campus. As you peruse these pages, take a moment to forget your reality and be immersed in the creative baptism of your peers. And to those of you whose work can be found between these covers (and to all of you who submitted works, published or no), be proud. You have become a creator.

Skie M. Whitcomb
Editor, *the tower 1995*

shooting star

Warmth of the candle, cold in the pale summer
window of the rain, flashes in the sky of the
last lantern of the mysterious answer —
Whisper gropes the silence — dreaming,
delicacy in the mid-sweat of this
shattered sweet wind,
oh breath of comets in the darker wilting
of stirring and globed illusion —
shy of the saints where the multitude ran —
  Glazed, my heart watching you die
in your gentle pain, as you bleed vividly
across your campus of time,
in the farer space, the star with an
        acquitted stir to soar —
brushed the dew off her shoulders with a
  wink of the phantom
tickled the flame in a thought,
 through the cabin - quilt
        and churning phantom of the stars . . .
Slithery liquid candlelight of scenic heat,
chandelier fuzzy aqua
sauntering skies —
silent morsels of thought,
planetarium sweet airs of data
        rumble . . .

Sarah Pounders

The Dragon

by Rachel Steele

As my chubby, three-year-old hand reached for the door, a voice called from the other side, "Don't you come out here, Rachel!" The warning was heeded, and I proceeded to hobble here and there, leaving my infamous mark on everything I could reach. (Sticky fingerprints are an only child's worst nightmare.)

In an instant, a brilliant bolt of lightning jolted my little brain. Someone had let up the clutch on my overactive imagination and I was off.

The dingy, burnt orange and dull green living room had miraculously transformed into a grand, medieval castle with deep, rich, golden tapestries, their abundance clothing the naked stone walls of the castle. I strolled through my creation with a remarkable stride, my soft leather boots making dull thud . . . thuds, as if to announce my royal presence in the corridor. As I passed a torch, its flame licking the cinder-coated stone in the swiftly narrowing stairwell, I stopped to pose in the beautiful orange flame. I gazed at the grandiose reflection; my hair tied back in two ponytails revealed all but the healthy rose tint in my cheeks and the artistic, jagged smear of "Brilliant Red" lipstick that stretched across my face. I was about to sit and admire my silhouette a little longer when a chilling noise flooded my ears. I fled up the steep, winding stairway to the highest tower in my castle. The huge, jaggedly cut picture window revealed the worst of what I had expected. The source of that terrifying river of sound was the legendary dragon, "Kitty"! My heart raced as my brain weaved a gory picture that brought me to my now-skinned knees. Kitty was hungry! "My subjects, my poor subjects!" I screamed. I danced faster than my heart racing down the treacherous stairwell to save my people and catch that famished dragon. I jumped roaring, sword in hand, towards the door just in time to see my mortal enemy shimmy through the slender tear in the white screen door.

As my sticky, popsicle-stained fingers slipped away from the knob on the outside of that weather-worn door, I heard my mother scream.

I was watching my mother snip the delicate wire away from the outside of the door's locked frame when something mumbled deep inside my sorrow-wrought psyche. "I didn't mean to!" I sniffled.

The adventure scurried into the shadows as quickly as it had arrived. My castle was just a house, my red and white Strawberry Shortcake tennis shoes were no longer soft leather boots, and my shining steel sword was only a half-melted orange dreamsicle slowly drip . . . drip . . . dripping on the ground. ◆

I Was Only A Child

All I do is miss you.
My heart breaks, I can't see your face.
I look for it in my heart it tears me apart
when all I see is disease.
I was only a child I remember the pain.
Sometimes I see the darkness of death
creeping under your once driven eyes.
I remember the petal-like softness of your hand
wondering why your life-line was too short.
I remember the day you cried, not knowing I was there,
wanting to tell you you didn't need hair to be beautiful
but I was only a child.

People say I have your spirit..
Especially the shape of your eyes
And sometimes I see your smile when I look in the mirror.
When my heart aches for hurting people, I feel your compassion.
But mostly I have a child's memory,
One that contains the after-school popsicles
Or the countless knee-kisses from bicycle wrecks.

When I search for the understanding of why you left,
and why so soon
I see you in a sunflower, smiling back at me
Or in the fullness of the moon, glowing with delight.
I see your tears falling in the rain, trying to wash away my pain.
This is all I have of you because I was only a child.

Kristie W. Mize

Double Down

Somewhere, now,
a little girl/ boy is being driven to madness.
The fear in this mansion/trailer is so real you can taste it.
Daddy is in the room again.
The smell of one malt scotch/malt liquor is pungent.
The keys to his Volvo/pick-up rattle
as he unconsciously fingers his prick
through his pants pocket.
He stands over the bed.
A voice in the hall,
he turns and leaves.
Thank you, God no games/love tonight
but tomorrow . . .

J.O. Pickett

No Tears, No Tomb

See that old woman, she lives alone,
surrounded by older wooden walls
and memories of those long dead.
That old woman she lives alone; her godless soul
weathered, hardened by time.
She calls the preacherman Bastard.
That old woman she lives alone, her bones weakened
by the touch of time's softly murdering hands.
That old woman she lives alone,
not a care in the world
nor a friend to match,
acid in her soul; sour, corrosive.
That old woman she lives alone,
never shed a tear for nobody. "Fuck em' "
she'd say without a blush.
That old woman she'll die alone;
no tears, no tomb.

David Faust

Untitled

Why? is a word I cannot ask you.
It seems so in vain and a waste of breath.
I cannot be anything to you.
You don't love me for what I am.
I think I would be happier if
You didn't love me for who I am.
But you're too far gone for that shit.
You're too caught up with the "what" you
Think you're supposed to be.
Somehow it becomes fake coming from you.
You're nothing like I imagined you would be.
Then again, I guess it wasn't fair to imagine things about you.
But you weren't fair to me, now were you?
Hope isn't something to tease someone with.
It was cruel to make me hope for you.
I can forgive you for what you did,
But I will never accept what you have become.
I could've loved you like no other
But now I can't even think about you
Without picturing you face down, mouth open,
Wailing your Indian song under his heavy head.
I'll think of you often, brother.
I'll miss your eyes — a soulscape
I'll remember the soft roughness of your hands.
And I'll weep for the loss of your gentle play-kisses
The ones I keep safe in my mind-box
Overflowing with the treasures of my soul.
I hide you there, with your imaginary self,
The one I convinced myself to fall in love with.
I will never love for what I imagine someone.
I will never feel what is hopeless to feel.
I will never trust my own soul stream.
I don't know why Providence brought
Us together but I do know this,
I could help you find yourself
Inside the shallowness of my stockings
Full of the hot, sweltering feelings I
Feed for you.

Staci Thomas

Sarajevo Lovesong

Lovers fly away
From reigning madness,
Fleeing through streets
And fields
To freedom and future.
Tomorrow just in sight,
Now ripped away
By hot metal hatred
Burning dreams to
Ashes.
Bodies dropping to bloody earth,
Her arms around him,
Flesh monument
To genocide.

Jerri Buckingham Hardesty

Prelude

7 seconds in Hell,
 flaccid,
in a room without a view,
 bald judgment,
dripping like tar
from over-white teeth
 in a shit-eating grin.
My God my God
why have you forgotten me
 a little salvation
for a lot of condemnation
but talk is cheap
when there's no honey for the bears
 and no room
for a sinner like me

Mark A. Richards

Amerikkana

cool Tuesday breeze to drink
light the candles now
I hear the roar of a new beast
and the traditions of last night
are quickly put to rest . . .

the strangers called friends
and the family of quiet lunatics
who worship the green
with open open hands
and easy cotton smiles

the girl with the gun
and the red lipstick
shot herself in the woods
they found her out and shiny damned
with a picture of the old man in hand

(sick, slick the horrorshow, turn out
the lights when you're done).

the freaks and the preachers
and a lonely mother's son
singing lullabies in the dark,
said offer up a joyful noise
and better make sure the words are right —

the sex politicians, the sinless cynics
and the lonesome whiskey poets
have gathered to speak
at the black crossroads
where demons and sages meet

(it's sick, slick the horrorshow, turn out
the lights when you're done).

they kept him in a cage of glass
the Lord's lamb in a box
and some would claim to hear him sing,
fair cherub of the flock

oh little boy with stones for eyes
i did not hear you cry
the world was mad
i'd lost my will
i'd lost my insight

(so slick sick the horrorshow
oh say can you see the light
and broken shadows dance like life
oh where are you tonight?)

chaos conversation
and ballroom congregations
there's an empty pew up front
and left to right, right to left
this evening calm fades and withers . . .

so sick is this slick
so pure the horrorshow
I want to hear to hear the girl from Heaven
and the little boy in Hell

lightening caves, the catacombs
my cemetery quiet and full

so slick so sick the horrorshow
turn out the lights when you're done.

Keysha D. Garrison

bad trinity

my hands melt whenever I want to throw furniture
for Death courts the woman I am sometimes
he comes all over her frightened shadow
and the man I am sometimes fights him with loud words . . .

the three of them make quite a scary movie

and when I can't watch or listen anymore
I become my violent father . . .
but everytime my thin little fingers
wrap around the arm of this chair or that table leg
or another lamp's neck . . .
my hands melt.

p.c. wilm

Subliminal Exclamation

It's believable!
(thou shalt not kill!)
Really believable
(thou shalt not kill!)
like when someone tells you
(thou shalt not kill!)
that kermit the frog is satan
(thou shalt not kill!)
and jesus drives a '72 mustang
(thou shalt not kill!)
then i broke into a casual sweat
(thou shalt not kill!)
and swallowed everything he said
(thou shalt not kill!)
like robitussin or razor blades
(thou shalt not kill!)
with an eminent socratic face
(thou shalt not kill!)
and the sound of nails
(thou shalt not kill!)
pounding through flesh.

Mark A. Richards

Black

The Blackness flows over the ramparts
That I built so high, so strong
Walling the world away
From my gentle heart
But now I see the world within
For I have fallen through the mirror
Of delusion into the abyss
Of cold dark reality.
The Shadow grows, the wall,
The wall of my will,
The wall that was oh so strong
Against hurt and anguish,
Begins to crumble and crack,
As the Dark tears apart
My inner sanctum.
A hole seared through my soul,
Screaming your name
Knowing that only you
Can fill the empty space
Repair rended emotions
But when I reach for you
I embrace only the
Cold dark empty
A nothingness of frigid reality,
It wraps around me
In an embrace of Black
Darkens my soul
And stills my heart.

Sean Puckett

The Smoking "R" Gang

by John Steere Wendel

We waited for him on the porch where we had spent many of our days on that long hot summer. There we would sit around drinking cups of syrupy black coffee. The coffee serving as a means to promote mad conversations in order to adjust to the heat-charged lunacy that is late summer in Alabama. There in the heat of the day with our black coffee and only the awning above to protect us from the sun's rays, we would pray for long cool showers of rain to drop from the sky. Anticipating the drops like a young Baptist boy might anticipate being dunked into a font. And that is just what our street next to our porch became, in August, during a rain: a tremendous baptismal ground where cool drops of water come tumbling out of the sky, like manna from heaven.

The him in question is Billy Gregory Lee. He had befriended all of us when we were just growing comfortable with the idea of being unstable young college students; and just stepping into a way of life that we all feel quite settled in (at least for the time being): that of coffee sipping, porch sitting, creative on good days, drunk on bad days (though drunk on some good days, too) mad bunch of fools. Foolish but probably no less correct than anyone else.

Billy had gone off to a mythical place that we in Alabama know as "the West"; leaving behind all of what he considered to be backwards, and conservative, and unopen to creative expression, and lacking a sense of poetic beauty. He had hoped to find a land, out there, of enchantment and enlightened souls. And that is all right by me, I suppose, though I must say I do feel quite content on the porch, sitting in the Flannery O'Connor rocking chair (so named for the peacocks embroidered on the cushion), rolling a cigarette, while P. paces around scratching his scruffy chin, and D.D. sits on some other chair with a blank expression on her face that invites one to ask "what is wrong?", yet we do not do so, knowing that she will just say "nothing" in a tone synonymous with "why do you care?", or "you really wouldn't understand". And really a whole lot isn't wrong, only somehow she got it in her head that it is romantic to act pitiful and pouty like one of her idols that she reads about in *Spin* magazine. Sometimes P. grows quite frustrated by D.D.'s attitude and asks me to roll him up a cigarette "for medicinal purposes," he explains. I tease him about this and he says, "I know, I know." When he gets his cigarette, he takes a seat on the steps, occasionally taking a short, slow drag, staring at the traffic with contemplative eyes, every now and then spitting out pieces of tobacco, and shaking his head over just about everything in general.

****

The mid-afternoon sun came beating down on the pavement with no mercy. Cars roared by at ungodly speeds without any concern that maybe a young child might happen to walk in front of their path.

Cars cars everywhere: great big eighteen-wheelers spewing massive clouds of exhaust, little cars, big cars, day-glow cars spraying their territory with monotonous super-woofer-charged bass tracks, like big dick kitty cats looking to "git 'em some." This was a time of day that had to be waited through, keeping in mind that in fifteen minutes, or so, we would be able to relax to the sounds of something a little more aesthetically pleasing like Miles Davis blowing on his blue horn, or John Prine singing crackly throat songs about love and love lost.

Waiting for the calm to return to the street and waiting for Billy, we swilled down our third cup for the day. I had taken to pacing about while P. began playing with a little trinket suspended by a string from the awning, and D.D. sat in a chair with that distant look on her face, not saying much of anything.

"Where could he be?" asked P. "He was supposed to be here yesterday."

"Who knows," I replied. "I guess he's planning a grand entrance."

"What do you mean?" asked D.D.

"Aw hell, I don't know. I just think . . . hell, I don't know."

"Yeah," said P., who seemed only half conscious of what I said. "Yeah, I think I know what you mean."

About this time Rusty Ray Moore came waddling onto the front porch from upstairs with his blue jeans hanging half way down his butt and his hair in disarray,

looking like the Three Stooges' lost beatnik brother. Walking and talking with a certain clumsy grace that doesn't bear the mark of any particular place, neither in time nor in location. Truly out of time.

We all turned to greet him except for D.D., who just sat in the chair looking blank and mysterious.

"Hey guys," said Rusty Ray.

"Hey," said P. and myself.

"Oh hi," said D.D. in her somber tone to which Rusty Ray had grown so accustomed that he hardly noticed it any more, like a hole in a wall or the monotonous buzz of a shorted electrical wire.

"Guess what?" Rusty Ray announced with a wild look in his eye, and as if he were about to tell us that he had seen the Lord Jesus Christ walking naked down Main Street.

"What is it?" I inquired.

"It's gonna rain!"

And this probably was the next best thing to hearing that Jesus was naked in the streets, at least for P. and myself whose eyeballs grew to the size of cantaloupes at the thought of cool showers.

"How wonderful!"

"Beautiful!"

Silence from the chair that D.D. occupied.

"Yeah," said Rusty Ray in a cool tone. "I just heard it on the radio. I thought you guys might like that. It's kinda like hearing your most hated teacher got pneumonia on the day of a test you've been dreading all week. Hey, does any one got a smoke? Oh, wait . . . never mind . . . I've got one right behind my ear here. Ahh ha! So, did y'all's friend ever show up?"

"Sure hasn't."

"Oh well, I'm sure he'll be around. I've been thinking that I might like to go out West sometime. You know, see some sights, drink some beers, that kind of thing. Maybe your friend Billy or Willy or whatever would let me stay with him for a few days. But who knows, maybe I'll just stay put for a while. I've got plenty to do around here. Besides, people might think I'm turning into a hippie or some shit like that."

****

Rusty Ray lit his cigarette and started walking toward his room upstairs. With his characteristic slow stride, his mischievous brow and directionless hair, he appeared to me to be both man and child: tall and developed like a full-grown man, yet embodying a countenance of innocence and childhood wisdom despite his twenty-three or twenty-four years of experience.

As Rusty Ray turned the corner, P. said, as if reading my mind:

"Man, Rusty Ray is like one of the 'R' gang or something."

"Yeah," I said, "or like one of the Peanuts, but with a hip slapstick twist."

"Hmmmm. I wonder which one he would be. Probably Spanky, because he is kind of like the wise leader who always gets the 'R' gang into trouble. And you know that Spanky would had to've been the first of the gang to start smoking, which would prompt the rest of them to start. Yeah, that's it, Spanky with a cigarette. That's who Rusty Ray really is."

"Ahh hut-hut . . . . yeah. You know, he could be kind of like our leader. We could build a club house and have secret handshakes and no girls would be allowed in our club and we would smoke cigarettes in our club house as if we were trying to hide from our parents or our friends' parents or the neighborhood enemies who would narc on us to our parents which would get us grounded. Then Rusty Ray would come up with some crazy plan to get revenge on the neighborhood bully enemies that would not quite work and would get us in bigger trouble with our parents."

D.D. cracked a smile at this and P. said:

"Yes, yes . . . that's the way things should be. But who would we be? Stymie and Alfalfa maybe . . . Or maybe it doesn't really matter because we wouldn't really be the 'R' gang, only almost like the 'R' gang . . . The Smoking 'R' Gang."

"That's 'Our Gang,'" said D.D.

"What?" asked P.

"'Our Gang,' not The 'R' Gang."

"Well then. We will be called the 'R' gang," insisted P., "so as to spare any confusion with the black and white 'Our Gang.'"

"Gee sorry," said D.D., looking all blank.

"Well!" declared P. in mock offense. "You are forgiven . . . I guess."

"Oh my God!" he blurted out suddenly in a cracked falsetto. "Look over there."

He was pointing in the direction of the First Baptist Church where dark rain clouds were just beginning to form in the distance, over the dome, caressing the lower portion of the steeple.

****

Our coffee-induced "R" Gang fantasy was temporarily put on hold due to the sudden weather development. P. rushed into his apartment room to put on some music that he thought conducive to a nice rain shower. He chose an old Miles Davis record, the title of which I am totally ignorant, my only concern being the slow tense sounds of his blue horn.

"Listen," declared P., "Miles. Miles Davis. Now if only Billy would show up. He's long overdue."

I did not respond, but just stared at the dome of the Baptist Church. My primary concern was rain, whether Billy was here to partake in the splendor of it or not. My head was spinning from the coffee and I was starting to break a sweat just sitting there on the porch. The clouds were slowly approaching. I silently prayed for water.

No sooner had I thought the words "dear Lord" when a heavy warm breeze came blowing through the trees, onto the porch, and down the road, sending pieces of paper and leaves chasing after each other down the sidewalk, creating little dust tornadoes spinning here and spinning there. P. came walking out the screen door, pretending to blow smooth elongated notes on an imaginary trumpet. He then noticed the breeze.

"My god! Where did this wind come from? Maybe Miles conjured it up with his horn."

"Could be," I replied.

P. returned to blowing his imaginary horn, and I cast my eyes once again to the oncoming clouds. They came elegantly crawling toward town like a black panther in his jungle silently stalking his prey. Just as silent and almost as surprising, Billy suddenly appeared on the porch.

"Billy!" exclaimed P.

I turned to see him. He stood tall and thin. His arms were crossed over his chest as though he was clutching a teddy bear, or as though he was trying to protect his frail chest from something outside of himself.

"Hello," I said.

Silence from the seat that cradled D.D., who was waiting to be introduced.

"Hi," said Billy. "I'm not back in town five minutes and my picnic is already threatened by rain. Ho-hum."

"Well, how are you?" asked P.

"Oh, all right . . . I guess."

"Are you enjoying yourself out there?" I asked.

"Well . . . yeah. The whole thing is quite surreal. But really it's not quite what my creative energies are craving. I think I might save my money and go out of the country somewhere. Maybe South America or Tangier. . . . I see things haven't changed much around here."

"Ummmmm . . . just what do you expect to find in Tangier, Billy?" I asked. "Atlantis?"

"I'm not sure. But something that I can't find here. Of course, you probably wouldn't understand."

"I'm sure I wouldn't."

****

We all stood there in silence for a minute. P. kicked at a crack in one of the floor boards, I stared at the clouds that were coming closer and closer, Billy stood there with his arms crossed, and D.D. remained unchanged. The developing tension was broken by Rusty Ray, who came strutting back on the porch. He stopped next to Billy.

"You must be Willy," said Rusty Ray.

"That's Billy."

"If you insist."

Rusty Ray cocked his eyebrow and shuffled toward the steps.

"Aw beautiful," he exclaimed. "Miles Davis. Just beautiful."

"Where did you go?" asked P.

"Well, you see," explained Rusty Ray, "I went upstairs to make some toast. Sometimes you just gotta have toast, or at least I do. Anyway, I put my bread in the toaster and decided I wanted to get clean, so I stepped in the shower. All was going beautifully until I remembered that my toaster didn't pop up automatically. So all of the sudden, I hopped out of the shower and ran into the kitchen, only it was too late. My toast was burnt black like pieces of carbon paper (or is carbon paper blue?). Anyway, this would have been OK because I could have toasted another piece of bread, only I was all out. So I had a banana instead. It was pretty good but I really had my heart set on that piece of toast."

P. and I let go two shrieking busts of laughter at Rusty Ray's story. D.D. kind of chuckled in her chair, and Billy made a feeble attempt at cracking a smile.

Rusty Ray held out the palm of his hand and said:

"It's starting to sprinkle."

I looked at the sidewalk. Little splotches of water

appeared as if, without sound, they came from nowhere. But the drops soon fell with a pitter and a patter, creating a directionless beat that nicely accompanied the sounds of the quintet emanating from inside. Rusty Ray stood there, fully clothed, soaking up the drops. In seconds we had a full blown shower. It poured down like a billion happy birthday streamers, only wet and cool. P., Rusty Ray, and I all screamed in unison:

"Rain! Thank sweet Jesus for rain!"

Billy did not seem so enthusiastic about the sudden development. I couldn't have cared less. D.D. got a little color in her cheeks, so I figured she was privately enjoying the whole thing. P. went inside to get some coffee. He came out with two cups and told Rusty Ray to warm up with some.

"Thanks, man," said Rusty Ray. "Hey, does anyone have a cigarette? Wait . . . never mind . . . I stashed one behind the lamp here. You know, for emergency purposes."

The three of us stood there, sharing coffee and passing Rusty Ray's cigarette.

"Care for a swig of coffee?" I asked Billy, who stood in the same place and in the same position that he arrived in, only for whatever reason growing progressively more pouty while staring out at the rain.

"Oh . . . no thanks."

"Suit yourself."

There was a gutter drain just above the steps that was gushing water by the gallons. I took my shirt and shoes off and stood under it, then I stepped onto the sidewalk. I was followed by P. and Rusty Ray. Rusty Ray wore "Shazam" boxer shorts that stuck just below his navel. His pants, which had grown heavy from the rain, barely clung to his butt.

"Come on, guys," commanded Rusty Ray, assuming the role of our fearless leader.

"Join us," P. said to Billy.

"I think I'll stay where it is warm and safe, thanks."

"Suit yourself," I said.

P. and I hopped along the sidewalk after Rusty Ray. I felt like I was eight years old, and my buddies and I were running our merry way far from the stuffy adults we left behind on our beloved porch. In the distance, church bells could be heard. P. and I both chimed in to the hymn, sounding like a cracked drunken choir:

Christ our Lord is risen today
Ah-a-aah-a-aahh-le-eh-loo-oo-ya
Our triumphant holy day
Ah-a-aah-a-aahh-le-eh-loo-oo-ya
Raa-ra-ra-da-da-ba-baaa . . .

et cetera, until we were no longer singing but chanting.

Cars drove by and occasionally a passenger or two would give us a look suggesting, "Boys your age have no place playing in the rain."

After many minutes the rain let up, turning into a heavy drizzle. Rusty Ray suggested that we take a break. We sat down on a curb, sticking our wet heads between our knobby knees, and occasionally spat into the water stream flowing at the bottom of the curb, into the sewer. Rusty Ray cleared his throat and set one sailing.

"Wow! Didja see that hocker?" asked Rusty Ray.

"Beautiful," I said.

"Green!"

P. sat silently staring at the stream, making no mention of the hocker. After a few moments of reflection, he turned to me and said:

"Billy sure seems distant."

"I guess it suits him," I replied.

"Hmmmm . . . maybe so."

P. returned to his reflection, and Rusty Ray continued to send what seemed to be an endless supply of hockers floating down the miniature river. He soon grew bored with this activity and said:

"All right, guys, that's enough rest. Let's head back."

We walked back to the porch, in silence, enjoying the remaining bits of drizzle.

****

When we returned to the porch, D.D. was no longer sitting in the chair but standing up by the steps, smoking a cigarette. Billy was no longer there.

"Where's Billy?" inquired P.

"He left," answered D.D.

"But why?"

"He said he's gone to Atlantis. You need not write or call."

"Oh, how awful."

"What the fuck does he expect," I said, "a parade?"

"That's o.k., guys," said Rusty Ray. "He can go to Atlantis if he wants, but he can never be in our club. Rule number one is: No Girls Allowed. Ahhhh ha ha."◆

Sunday Morning Coming Down

by John Steere Wendel

I woke up on a Sunday still feeling slightly drunk and only a little hung over. I lay in bed and coughed up the remnants of Saturday night's festivities. It seemed like the perfect day to lay in bed, listening to Johnny Cash records, wallowing in loneliness. Before I made any plans on this desolate morning I grabbed a cigarette from by bedside table and smoked. This was becoming one of the few rituals I performed consistently and with any passion. As I lay there the cat climbed out from underneath the covers, hiked her leg in the air, and began cleansing her twat with her sandpaper tongue. Every now and then she would eye me disapprovingly as if she wanted to say that my smoking disgusted her.

"Aw, Cat," I said, "you're starting to act like a mother. If I want to smoke then that's my business. After all, I don't ask you not to lick your twat in my presence."

The cat merely batted her eyelashes at this and began kneading at a spot on my chest, demanding, with a meow, that I scratch her neck or behind her ears. Cats are smart. I feed my cat, I pet my cat, I pay my cat's doctor bills, and yet my cat does hardly one fucking thing for me. Even so, I love my cat.

Having smoked my cigarette and talked to my cat, I contemplated a course of action for the day. It was simple, there would be none. It was Sunday, the Lord's day, and I hadn't a thing to do. To plan a course of action would be blasphemous. Besides, I've never been much of a planner.

I had the world at my command. I had nothing to do; therefore there was nothing I could not do, with the exception of purchasing alcohol (it being a Sunday in my fine observant community). If I did feel the need to have a drink, though, there was always someone around who would have some leftover beer or a tucked away bottle that they were willing to share.

Upon realizing the extent of my good fortune on this day I stumbled out of bed, causing the Cat to grumble under her breath.

"Jesus, Mable, you didn't really expect me to lay around all day scratching your neck, did you?"

"Meeaaoowwa," she responds while attempting to obstruct my path, almost causing me to trip and break my neck.

"God dammit cat!"

I picked her up and threw her back on the bed. She arched her back and crossed her eyes, but soon stuck her face between her legs and returned to cleansing herself.

I stumbled into the bathroom, picking up some beat up old paperback, and proceeded to relieve myself of stale beer and recycled chili dogs. I stared at the back cover of the book and looked at the words that I had read a hundred times before and on the same seat. I wiped and flushed. Then I stepped into the shower washing away the layers of tar, nicotine, and stale yeast that accumulated on my skin the night before. I hummed a monotonous melody of a nameless song I must have picked up at whose ever house where I was celebrating no particular occasion.

After taking care of the toilet business I rummaged through my closet for something to wear. I settled on a pair of grey flannels, an oxford cloth shirt, and a tie; figuring that if I'm not going to be in church this morning I might as well dress the part.

I walked out the door to be greeted by a brisk autumn day. The leaves sailed through the air like a hundred silly drunken lovers madly dancing and dashing. This joyous dose of the season helped curb the traces of hangover lingering in my body.

I began walking toward town via the one-way bridge next to my house. Here I can engage in a ritual that I feel more strongly about than a Sunday morning cigarette in bed. It is a game that I play by myself whenever I cross the bridge. If there are a couple of big stray leaves sitting on the walkway, I pick them up. If there are none, then I pluck a couple off of the sycamore or the catawba that stand crooked over the water at the end of the bridge like a couple of withered old men playing dominoes. Then what happens is, I drop the leaves off the side of the bridge, admiring them flip flop in their descent into the sad lime-tainted water. I get on my belly and stick my head through the guard rail and watch the

races. The first leaf to make it to the other side of the bridge wins.

****

I was starting a love affair. Fortunately it had nothing to do with a girl, but with this Sunday in autumn. Strolling through the streets of this postage stamp sized town seemed almost ultimately more satisfying than the warmth of another body . . . almost.

On my way to wherever I may find myself, I come to a white picket fence that houses a spastic, drooling, purple tongue chow dog. As I walk past his white picket territory, he sticks his nose in a crack in the fence and begins to bark and growl, all cross-eyed and slobbering, like a born killer. I then stand, leaning over the fence with one eyebrow cocked, like a school teacher observing a student plugging away at a lesson, and say, "Now, now, there's a nice pup." The slobbering chow then looks at me with sad defeated eyes, and proceeds to chew away at an imaginary irritation on his ass. Having gone through these motions with the dog, a high-pitched cackle emanates from my lips, and I continue down the sidewalk, through the falling leaves, kicking sticks and stray pebbles past imaginary goal posts.

Around a corner and down the road a way, I reach the residence of my friend Jefferson. My knock on the door is followed by, "Shit, god damn vase, the hell you doin' on the floor?" and other verbal assaults against the bits of junk that make up his floor: books, magazines, writings, scribblings, old love letters, records, unmentionables, and various other fragments of his less than conventional life.

He cracks the door to see who is there. Initially the only features of his face I recognize are one wide eye sunk deep inside a fleshy cheek and a part of his big bushy mustache. Recognizing me he says:

"Horton, young friend, come on in."

"Thanks," I say.

"God damn, is it already Sunday?" he asks, noticing my attire. "I always lose track of everything on the weekend. So, how was the service?"

"Well, I'm not sure. Ahh, well you see, I just kind of felt like dressing like I was going to church. You know, it being Sunday and all."

"Ha . . . ha-ha . . . Oh lord! Ain't that America. He-he, well that's just fine, boy."

He takes a step back and scrutinizes my outfit, scratching his mustache. I smell liquor fuming from his mouth and nostrils, and notice that he wobbles while studying the print on my tie. His eyes begin to sparkle with tears of delight but soon change to a stern, almost threatening look. I am not alarmed.

"Listen," he says, eyeing me with the intensity of a tent preacher, "you ever loved a woman? I mean really loved a woman?"

"What?" I reply, not knowing quite what to make of this sudden question.

"What do mean 'what'? Shit, boy, have you ever loved a woman. I ain't asking a trick question. Yes or no?"

The color of his face starts matching the color of his perpetually red nose.

"Aw shit," he says chuckling, "he . . . never mind. Now listen, you've read a thing or two. Maybe you can give me your honest opinion of this piece I've been working on."

The color of his face slowly turns back to a semi-healthy shade of pink.

"Follow me."

I follow him back to his study, that is littered with sheets and sheets of typing paper, cigarette butts, and broken glass resulting from countless sacrificial ash trays thrown in fits of anguish. He stumbles over to a three-fifths-full liter of scotch. His throat lets out a low murmur of pleasure as he eyes the dark brown, almost red liquid.

"How about a drink?"

Before I can answer he hands me a small tumbler half filled with scotch. I thank him and ask him if he has any ice in his freezer. He apologizes profusely for not offering, and tells me to please feel free and help myself. I look in the freezer and find several trays of ice crystals. When I return he eyeballs my glass.

"What happened to the ice?" he asks.

"Ah . . . yes, well I changed my mind and decided to take it straight."

"Suit yourself. Now, listen up, boy."

Before beginning his recital he swallows half a tumbler in one healthy gulp, pours himself another drink, lights a cigarette, and puts on a pair of horn-rimmed reading glasses.

Staring at me over the rim of his glasses he asks:

"Listen, boy, have you ever loved a woman?"

"Well, yeah . . . I guess so."

"What do you mean guess? Have you ever loved a woman or haven't you?!"

His face begins turning the color of his nose again. Before he becomes totally flushed I answer him.

"Well, yeah . . . yes, I've been in love before." The pink color returns to his face.

"Good for you, boy. Now listen careful. This is titled 'A Poem for Lydia,' or 'Another Broken Ashtray'."

He attempts to focus his eyes on the poem, moving the paper up and down like the stage on a microscope. He clears his throat, then suddenly looks back at me.

"So just how hard did you love this little girl?"

"I liked her a lot. You know, she was pretty cool."

"What the hell do you mean you really liked her? I thought you said you loved this woman."

"Liked, loved. Hell, I don't know."

"Well shit, boy, I suggest you figure it out. Horton, I almost killed a man over this woman. Would you have killed over this little girl you say you liked so much?" He stares at me through the flesh of his reddening cheeks. I kill off the remainder of my drink.

"Shit, boy, don't look so shocked. Here, have another drink."

He gives me another half tumbler and pours himself a full glass.

"You'll have to pardon me, friend . . ."

"Yeah, I know. You're an asshole."

"Ha . . . ha-ha. Well yes I guess I do have a tendency to be somewhat of an asshole."

"Yeah," I say, "but I think it rather becomes you."

"He-he, well, I must admit I think so too. Ain't that America."

To make amends for his abrasiveness he pats me on the back and pours me more drink, not noticing that I have barely touched my previous fill. He swallows the remaining drink in his glass and pours himself another.

"All right," he says in all seriousness, "listen up. Who knows, you might learn something."

He stares at the paper for a second, scratching his mustache, and then he begins:

I think about you often
I think about you in barrooms, bedrooms, dining rooms, and bathrooms
I think about you over drinks, in my dreams, at meals and on the john
I think about your legs:
kind of awkward but sexy
I taste your legs in my drinks
I touch your legs in my dreams
I miss your legs

He pauses.

"You listenin'."

"Oh, yeah. Go on."

"Good for you, boy. Now here's the clincher."

I think about that pretentious metaphysical incense burning shit-head you took up with guttering your mind with his tongue, desecrating your legs with his hands
I spare his life
substituting his head
with
another broken ashtray
on
my study floor

Having finished reading his poem, he takes a red bandanna out of his back pocket and wipes the beads of sweat that have collected on his forehead. He finishes his drink and lights a cigarette. His eyes are downcast while he smokes. Fearing that he will pour me another drink, I place my glass on a book shelf at the other side of the room. He looks up and says:

"Now, I'm not so sure if the foul language fits. After all, I am writing to a lady. Even if she did run away with a transcendental yo-yo, whose mouth I wouldn't piss in if he was dying of thirst."

I don't know what to say, so I light a cigarette to temporarily occupy my mouth. He starts pacing the room rubbing his head and smoking. He looks at me and asks:

"Well, what do you think? About the language I mean."

"I guess it serves its purpose, though it might be a little harsh. Maybe . . ."

"Harsh! . . . Ha! . . . Hell, I ain't writing for a bunch of puritans. That settles it, the shit words stay."

"Good idea," I say.

"Yeah, I thought you'd see the light. Now, what did you think of the poem as whole? Just tell the truth. If there's one thing in this world I can't stand, it's a liar. So be a man, boy, call it like you see it."

Having demanded my criticism, he takes a large gulp of scotch straight from the bottle and hands it to me.

"Drink up, boy," he commands, "it isn't often you get to drink with such fine company. Now ain't that America. . . . He! . . . So where were we?"

I take a small hit off the bottle and respond:

"You were asking me . . . ."

"Ah yes, about the poem. Go ahead, boy. And by all means, be a man about it."

"Well . . . I think it is quite nice."

To this, he cocks his eyebrow so far that it practically meets his receding hairline.

"Nice!" he cries, "HA! . . . I'm baring my soul, man! What do you mean nice?"

"I mean I like it. Shit, man, I thought you wanted my opinion."

His eyebrow returns to its normal position and he apologizes:

"He! . . . You'll have to pardon me, boy, he-he, I guess I'm a little loaded. Not to mention the fact that I'm somewhat of an asshole. He-he, but I guess you already know that. Oh well, ain't that America.

"So you like it, that's a start. Now how was the feel of the thing?"

"I don't know. It's kind of intense, but . . . ."

"Well it's supposed to be intense! I'm talkin' about love, man. Didn't I tell you I loved this woman?"

He wipes his forehead, lights a cigarette and starts to pace the room. Every now and them he makes a noise like "ah" or "umm," as if he were about to say something, followed by a soft murmurous grumble. I light a cigarette and cast my eyes on the various bits of litter on the floor. Noticing a stack of books, I arbitrarily pick one out and start thumbing through it, staring at the words as if they were not interrelated. Jefferson takes the book out of my hand, looks at the cover with disdain and says:

"Horrible stuff. Brainwash crap."

He throws the book in the corner and studies the stack. He picks out another book and hands it to me.

"There you go. . . . Much better."

He takes a seat on his study desk, next to his bottle. He unscrews the cap and says:

"Lotta brainwash crap out there. . . . Gotta look out for this younger generation."

He hands me the bottle. It has only got a small sip left in it. I look at the bottle and then look back at Jefferson.

"Go ahead," he commands, pointing a limp drunken finger at me. "Drink up, boy."

He stands up and stumbles toward the door.

"Lotta brainwash crap," he says on his way into the hall, where he steps toward the bathroom, clutching the wall for support, mumbling all the way:

"Is what I kept tryin' to tell Lydia . . . lotta assholes . . . mmm . . . maybe I'm a . . . mmmm . . . god damn transcendental brainwash . . . aww, fuck it all."

The bathroom door shuts.

I finish my cigarette and put the scotch back on the desk, leaving the last swallow in the bottle. Pangs of hunger poke away at my stomach. Figuring that this is a good time to exit, I stand up, and attempt to walk a straight line down the hall. As I approach the bathroom door I hear a curious sound much like this beat-up old dishwasher my mother used to use. I crack the door and find a bloated and bespectacled middle-aged fetus sound asleep on the floor. I bend down and take off his reading glasses.

"Lydia," he says, "Lydia, I'm an asshole."

"Yes, I know," I respond.

I go to his living room and find an old wool blanket that smells like moth balls. I take it to the bathroom and cover up the fetus.

I leave the wreckage of my friend's house and reintroduce myself to the day. Back on the sidewalk I return to kicking sticks and stray pebbles under the falling leaves. ◆

One Sense of Time

I sing
Tick Talk.
and do cartwheels
down the highway
but cannot interrupt
time's conversation
with itself.
Time,
I hear your voice . . .
Tick Talk.
monotonous and
continuous and
low.
I hear you faintly,
but you are louder than
the circus and the sirens.
Time, turn tangible.
Tick Talk.
Let me taste you—
sweet, sour, bitter.
Let me breathe you.
Let me behold you
and hold you
and halt you.
You are
ticking and talking
away—
surrounding, never surrendering—
never pausing to catch your breath.
Time, exhaling,
exhausting,
incessant time,
murmuring time,
Tick Talk.
babbling time,
Shut up.

Brijin M. Hales

pieces of she, pieces of me

she
wearing mexiquan silver
and cotton from belize
dark american skin native to . . .
linoleum, pine-scented childhoods
and grass growing within white television fences

she
sitting on thatched roofs
walking on muddy waters
smoking jewels with her indians
watching the street through braids
of her yarn-entwined private battles

and I remember sitting on her porch
feet dusty with earth, hands salt-wet
summer in our hair, spring on our lips
happy in the vague, thin promise
of sleeping later
beneath a clean white linen moon

she
speaking in tongues
a lullaby I could recognize
and I could listen to all night
to her voice grown shadowed
while the crickets keep time

and oh how desperate it all dreams out
I want to take her away
to fields of splendor
to great deserts, vast and safe
yes, to a seamless horizon
that cannot contain her

she
immigrant child inside me

she
young and ancient

she
vessel of promise

she
giver and silent now.

Keysha D. Garrison

massacre of love

madman of the darkest scream, foldened
hands as I laugh inside
cooing through the misting, held silence
the quantum mesmorations of the love,
the synagogue of sideros — the drowning
denial for but a drop of rain or a
scarlet flush in the cheeks of the earth's
torrid, sallow soft humming breast
Here is my meridian of pain,
the liquor of dreams and tremor of
my blue-eyed lover who is now but in air,
captured in the Nile of solemn insanity,
purified in the death of thunderous tears
ripping perils of the orbit lost upon the
lacy flowers of our portals,
raining with the night's last sweat
the crickets have lost their lucid mirth,
lest they scathe me with the sword of
dreams, the dark immensity of your
emotion, bleeding from your eyes
And I in flavorless dancing, I was a
pale solstice, sinking deeper into the
tender flesh of the earth again,
to hide in the myrrh of laughter
strikes like a theatrical kiss,
coolly transparent on the mesmoration
of a cloud in fragrant plume,
chastity reeks as the wild sigh
echoes,
Why laceration of a pounding mind
to pulse forever in the
secret, sacred skies.

Sarah Pounders

Sonnet of Love's Viscous Cycle

English/ Shakespearean Sonnet

These keepsakes wear hearts hard with deep-grooved scars:
Old yellowed valentine, dry prickly rose,
And furtive wishes dreamed on dying stars —
Warmth leaves love's touch; who dares say where it goes.
When cupid's tools wear smooth and deadly dull
And cherubs flee to indigo drenched skies,
We grieve, in shock — until the senses lull,
Scar tissue fades, the soul no longer cries.
No tears for days diminished by despair,
Nor for this thought that echoes in the mind:
"No one will hurt me if I'm not laid bare."
If I resolve to hide myself I find
Time passes surely when alone, apart —
'Til hope takes wing and risks the new-healed heart.

Randy Williams

Sleep Disordered-

i found
a note on the pillow where
your head would lay
(or did you lie?) in our sleep,
where dreams became plans
of a future on the waking.
(I am waking . . .) your legs wrapped forever
round my memory those too few nights
of shared warmth and fragile hopes
for endless mornings *(. . . waking to find*
a note on the pillow that stubbornly
holds your scent.)
we've lost. morning now,
mourning how our common dream started
breaking apart while still
wrapped around a part of, or place
in me— *(. . . that stubbornly holds the note*
you sent, recalling words,
trying to feel, to fill . . .) —an empty space
where your promise used to beat.
(I am waking, apart)

Randy Williams

Seduction

My contented heart ever quakes
for the moving shadows of my darling Yates
Woe is this that I can not utter much
the ever lest moments of a day
To the crested beauty of my eye
grazing in a forlorn pasture
Oh no more of this riddling may I ever
tarry from this page
In the light of my crested beauty my body
will lay as dormant as its predator prey

LK McCormick

Need Not

Visions of you
Drift through my mind
On clouds of pleasure
Pleading for existence
In the harsh material reality
of our lives

Need not.
Want not?
I want what I don't need
Alluring without effort
Ensnared, caught in a trap
Of purest pleasure
Sprung with self knowledge

Love you.
Want you.
Need you?
If only you and me
In the realm of serendipity
Could exist as an entity
Free of complicated contradictions

Then life would be
Like a flowering rose
The beauty of the bud
The pleasure of the thorn

Sean Puckett

Blind

The church steeple slices
Through the horizon
The church bells
Clang with all their might
The choir belts out the hymns
With all the air in their lungs
The sound echoing through the sanctuary
Sending a cold chill over my body
All heads bowed, thanking God
For the little pleasures of life
And for the greatest miracles
Inconceivable by man
The power of the Holy Spirit
Pulsates through my veins
With every word the
Pastor slams with authority
These days are gone
It's politically incorrect now
"God does not exist," they say
"How could you be so blind"
"My blindness has enhanced
My other senses," I say to them
I can feel the deep wounds
In His loving hands
I can taste the wine
That is his blood
And the bread
That he did break
And I did hear him calling
To me in the night
So I pray for you, my friend
For it is you who is blind

Loyd McIntosh

Vulcan's Mane

Master of the kiln,
Vesuvius standing
in a shower of sparks
the hammer beats a
glowing vein of steel
saying to these lifeless
hunks: "become organic!"
bending the wind under
your arm, soothed by the
smoothness and wetness of
earth, our oldest father's
flesh which now you wield
as brash as a battle axe,
as delicate as the brush
of an eyelash, blowing into
their mouths. Surely
you must be a god, for only
a man with the strength
of Atlas could carry
such a head on his shoulders.

Ben Marston

Orgasmammalia

Knobgoblin
Darkside whispers
Holy Catholic Condemnation
Opposites attract
Similars meat
CRIMSON
URGINGS
Orbs flashing
Salts mingle
Time dissolves
Cosmos inconsequential

RELEASE!
shared
secreted
sacrament or sacrilege
wheel turns waiting
REUNION.

J.O. Pickett

Black Coffee

Like a lion ready to kill,
he softly treads
up the steps and down the hall
to find his sleeping prey.
He opens my bedroom door,
wakes me,
rapes me,
then goes back to bed.
A cowardly retreat after victory.

Morning comes
and we sit as a family
around the breakfast table.
He greets me
with a bandaid
smile of love
  and amnesia
to hide the night
as he eats his eggs and toast
and receives tribute for
patriarchal purity
like creamer for his coffee.

i think he should take his
coffee black.

catherine binkerd

I Am The Rose

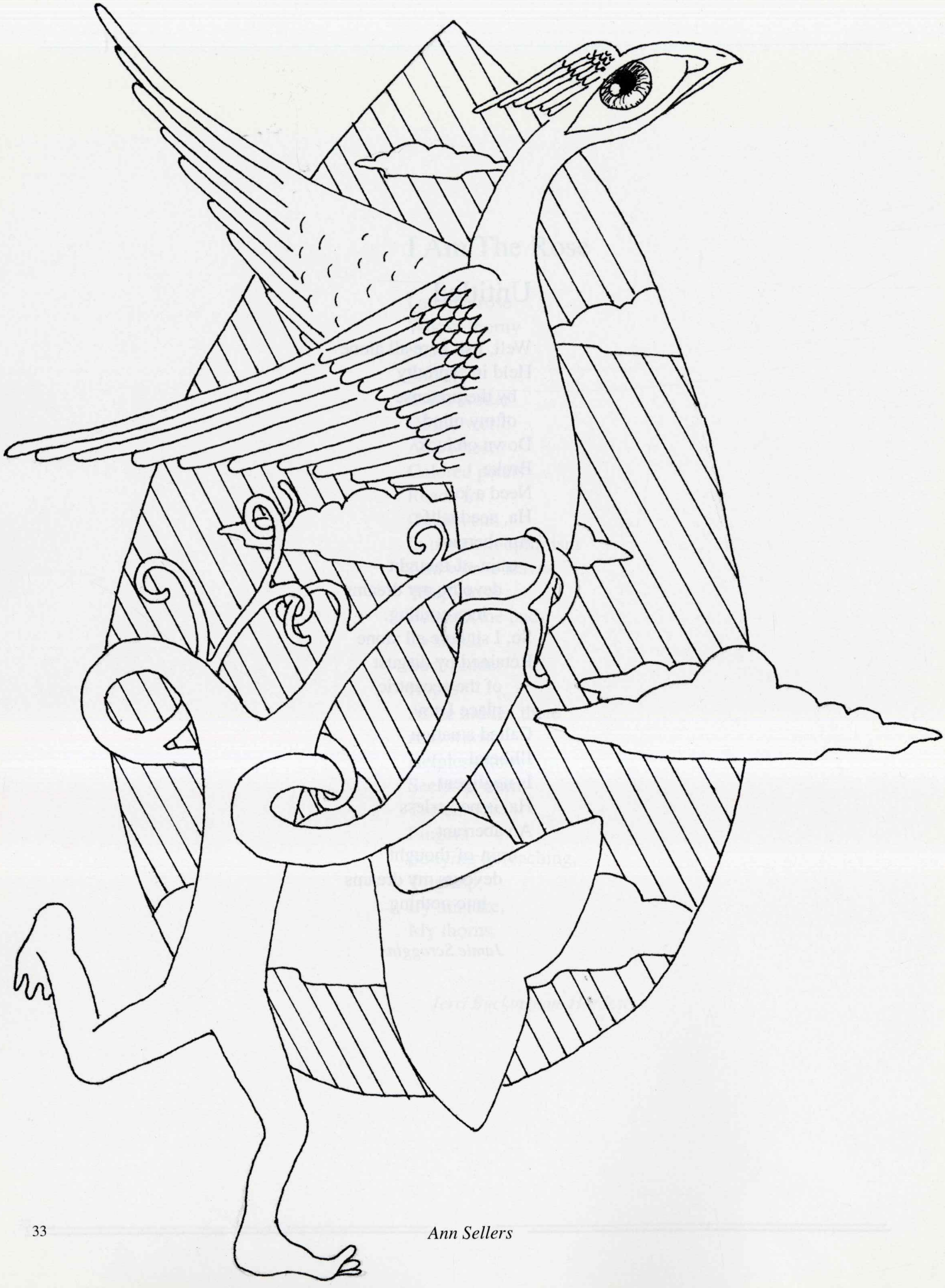
I am the rose
Whose thorny
Stalk
Shivers
In the winter
Of my world
And whose
Colored petals
Reach for
Golden sun
In innocent optimism
And whose leaves
Wrap close
Beneath the bud
To shield
Such tender
Hopes
As lie hidden there
And whose
Helpless form
Seeks to warn
The careless
Fingers
Straying in reaching,
To grasp,
By mistake,
My thorns.

Jerri Buckingham Hardesty

Untitled

Well, I sit here all alone
Held in captivity
  by the pretense
  of my mind
Down on luck
Broke
Need a job
Ha, need a life.
An aberrant
  train-of-thought
    devours my dreams
      into nothing.
So, I sit here all alone
Retained by disgust
    of the eccentric
    place I am
Called a nation
Illiberal
Is negligent
Ha, is powerless
An aberrant
  train-of-thought
    devours my dreams
      into nothing.

Jamie Scroggins



Ann Sellers

dig those ghosts!

by p.c. wilm

(inspired by Dickens' "A Christmas Carol")

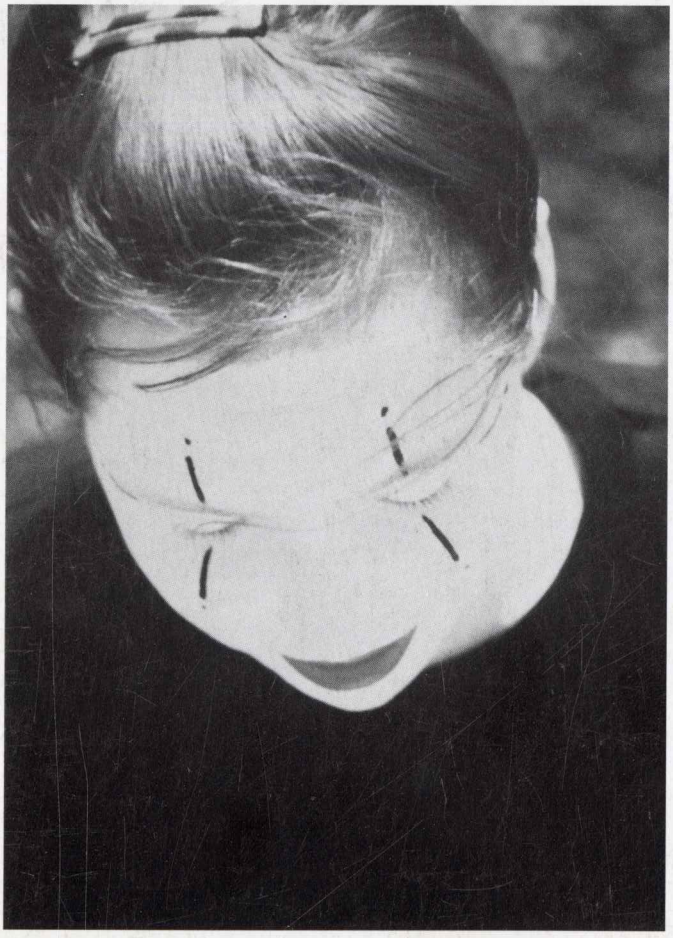
MEMORIES . . . little ghosties all flittering and fluttering . . . floating around like thin almost see-through grey pieces of ash in one ear and out one eye and straight through this hand of mine wriggling, scribbling, fibbling and fabbling all the while, feeling like I am Jazz myself, like that could easily be my name . . . my title . . .

"I AM JAZZ they tell me! they come to me from miles and miles deep inside those vast hills and plains of my brain, always bearing crude gifts of Things Already Happened, flickering by in sepia tone, scratched and ripped in places, many names rubbed off, identities and dates lost for good . . . but what do you know? here they are, boxed and preserved, looking as fit as they can in their year-cakes of dust and their thin films of debris . . .

gifts of Things Happening Right Now as we speak with purged lips, as we stand listening with hands cupped to ears, seeing with eyes left squinting, always searching . . . as if we deserve better . . . us in our empty white rooms sitting with hands folded in our stiff metal folding-back chairs just waiting, waiting, waiting for the Excitement to happen, for the Huge Crowd to rush right in and get the party started while our faces turn slowly from dull to smile to laugh to sudden hysterics and back again . . . and this shall last all day into the dark and limitless night . . .

gifts of Things That Haven't Even Happened . . . Things That Have Yet To Happen and Things That Could Probably Happen That Really Might NEVER Happen . . . to many, these are the greatest gifts . . . a better term for these is none other than Dreams . . . these are what the kids in the world LIVE for . . . visions of sugarplums . . . treasure buried under mountains . . . growing up to be brave firefighters, astronauts, and angels . . . they tell me that if we continue to dream, if we never stop, never let go of those relentless, never-tiring and near impossible dreams, then we too are the KIDS, coloring the walls, setting out on mad adventures, not having the slightest inkling of what REALLY might happen but always dreaming, dreaming, dreaming away so that each day filled with ghosts and memories will make such a cool movie for any of the other fellow kids to just sit and watch, to smile real big and DIG."

Departure

When you left,
you did not say goodbye —
just like the cowboy-hero
in a bad Western . . .
Except, when you rode
off into the sunset,
you put a gun to your head
to get the fuck out of Dodge.

catherine binkerd